

In our ongoing fight to bring more water to our Valley, I recently requested that California water regulators immediately examine the implications of wastewater discharges flowing from Sacramento into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta. For too long, Valley outsiders have blamed us for the decline in the Delta's health while they continue to dump pollutants into the water system.

June 7, 2010

Charles R. Hoppin, Chair
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Katherine Hart, Chair
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive, Suite 200
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6114

Dear Chairs Hoppin and Hart:

We are writing to request that the State Water Resources Control Board and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board take immediate action to address ammonia discharges from wastewater facilities into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta).

As you are aware, we have long held that the single focus of regulatory agencies on water exports is misguided in that it overlooks other key stressors that contribute to the decline of fisheries in the Delta. The effect of this single focus is to punish farmers, farmworkers and communities in the San Joaquin Valley at a tremendous impact to state's economy, and in the end the fish are no better off.

Two recent studies point to Sacramento's wastewater as a significant cause behind the declining fish populations in the Delta. One study, authored by Patricia Glibert of the University of Maryland, concludes that the Delta's environmental problems are more likely tied to wastewater pollution than to water diversions, indicating that increased ammonia in Sacramento wastewater has disrupted algae production in the Delta, which rippled up the food chain to compromise fish species. Another study by Inge Werner, a toxicologist at UC Davis, concluded that threatened Delta smelt may be harmed by exposure to ammonia at levels below federal limits and that long-term exposure could reduce smelt growth and feeding activity, which would ultimately affect their breeding success.

These studies cry out for immediate action by the responsible regulatory agencies. We understand that the Regional Board has renewed Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District's wastewater discharge permit annually without substantive review since it expired in 2005. As the single largest wastewater discharger in the Delta, it is crucial that the Regional Board conducts a full and immediate review of the District's permit and that the Regional Board conditions any renewal upon upgrading the sewage treatment system to a tertiary system. Tertiary systems have been installed throughout San Joaquin Valley communities as a result of regulations imposed by the Regional Board in order to improve water quality. We find it incongruous that the very board that has imposed tertiary treatment requirements on communities in the San Joaquin Valley, including Stockton, Modesto, Turlock and Fresno, has failed to impose similar requirements on the Sacramento District.

These studies confirm that ammonia wastewater discharges are a large part of the problem in the Delta. Reducing ammonia discharges needs to be part of the solution, along with the other key factors that are contributing to the environmental decline in the Delta. We call upon the Regional Board to take immediate action to correct this problem.

Sincerely,

JIM COSTA

Member of Congress

DENNIS CARDOZA

Member of Congress